

## [Ellie Robertson]

Spencer Mill Village

Spindale, N. C.

September 28, 1938

I. L. M.

### ELLIE ROBERTSON

She lives in one of the better-kept mill houses located on Spindale St. Her yard is clean, her porch lined with flower boxes. A lacy, luxuriously-fronded fern graces the front entrance. Not far from it an enormous begonia droops with waxy red blooms. There are petunias and marigolds blooming about her doorstep. A big-leafed vine shades half of her porch. The vine makes a cool nook for the swing in which she occasionally spends an hour or so during the summer time. She loves her home and she loves to stay in it.

She cares very little for picture shows and she has never cultivated an interest in other forms of amusement. Her husband likes square dances and goes to them. She stays at home with the children. The children, like their mother, have little interest in picture shows except when Shirley Temple is on. The oldest girl became frightened at a terrific fire scene in a picture when she was six years old. She was unaccompanied by an older person, and was with a child from across the street. Badly frightened she ran out of the show and home to her mother. Her mother says it was perhaps a good thing that she got scared then. She has never given her the trouble some children give their mothers in wanting to go to more shows than they can afford.

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Ellie is industrious and devotes much of her time to washing, ironing, cooking, and sewing for her family. Now in late September she and the children are digging a pit for keeping the flowers during the winter months.

There are two pieces of furniture in Ellie's house of which she is very proud. One is a big-cabinet radio and the other is a GE frigidaire. She keeps a clean house and a certain amount of order despite the many china cats, dogs, and other gewgaws which adorn the place. She becomes irritated at the thought that the mill company is so slow in repainting the houses, particularly the interior. "My notion is the superintendent is just a cheap guy and he don't [won't?] want to spend any more money on the houses than he can help," she says. "He likes to save all the money that's made for the company. They've promised me some new back doorsteps for six months and I haven't got 'em yet. It's been talked that they are goin' to sell all their houses and we'll have to rent 'em at a sight higher rent. If they do that, they'll be bound to raise wages some or there'll be plenty that caint live on what they make.

3

It would be hard on us and Jack gettin' one of the best wages in the mill."

Ellie's husband makes \$30 a week. She thinks he has done so well because he's stuck to his work, always putting work first and never thinking of such a thing as asking for a day off. And too, he has always been handy with machinery. That, she thinks, had a lot to do with his getting to be second hand in the weave room.

They were married when she was eighteen and he was seventeen. They had been neighbors always, living on mountain farms not far apart up in the Chimney Rock section. Ellie's father owned about a hundred acres of land, a large part of it in mountain pasture. But there were acres down below where they raised corn, beans, potatoes, cabbage — morethan was needed for home consumption. Ellie's father took the surplus to market and brought back cash which he saved for tax money.

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Everybody worked on that farm. Ellie herself could hoe before she was seven. She remembers long, back-breaking days of fodder-pulling, been-picking, and hoeing.

In the winter Ellie attended the near-by country school until she had completed the seventh grade. Her father had gone to school two months. "But he's a sight better scholar than I am," Ellie says. "Nobody 4 could fool his at figgers and he always keeps up with what's in the newspaper."

Ellie and Jack moved to the mill as soon as they were married. Jack started off in the weave room and made good. It was 1919 and wages were high. Ellie and Jack boarded that first year and began buying their furniture on the installment plan. They had a bedroom suite paid for when they started housekeeping at the beginning of their second year.

They were married three years before their first child was born. The fourth and last was born during the big strike of 1934. "Strikers from the mills down below come here and took charge," Ellie explains. "They was against the stretch-out that had just come on. They stopped the mill for awhile and plenty here in Spindale that joined lost their jobs. I remember like it was yesterday layin' in there in the bed and watchin' fifteen or twenty Spencer workers march up and down the street carryin' the United States flag and yelling out to the rest of the workers to join in a fight for their rights. They never got no new members and finally they quit. Jim went back to work as soon as the boss men got in charge and opened the mill up agin. He's never missed many days the thirteen year he's been here.

5

"I've knowed people though that's been willin' to work and somehow couldn't get along. I know a woman that had saved and bought her own house, and took care of her sick mother too. Her husband got out of a job and she was out down to one day's work a week. Her mother died and she didn't have money to bury her with. That was one Friday night

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back in the summer. Up to late Saturday they didn't know whether they was goin' to be able to bury her or not. Some of the neighbors went around and took up a collection to pay the grave diggers and buy the lot. Then this woman made arrangements with the undertaker and they got her mother buried Sunday mornin'. I heard the other day she was losin' her place and I expect she has held it long as she can.

“A collection come hard back then because so many people wasn't gettin' full time. I've been glad that Jim's got to work so steady. Up to now we haven't had to draw any rocking chair money. That's what they call the unemployment money, you know. Of course nobody don't know in these times when they'll be laid off. Jim'll work as long as he can get work though.”